

Dejá Vu for 'New' Red Sox Voice

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Boston-bred if not quite born.

Ken is a Hartford native. But his family moved to Dorchester by the time he was ready to go to school. His mother is a Roxbury native. So you could say he's half native Bostonian anyway. And his wife Ellen is from Jamaica Plain.

Coleman went to North Quincy High, then wound up in the Army in World War II and the Indo-China-Burma theater.

"Where General Stillwell — old, Vinegar Joe — was top honcho?" we reminisced.

"Yeah, I think he was there, too," quipped Coleman, always quick with the bonmot.

Thereafter, Coleman returned, put in his time at Curry College (then located in Boston) after which he launched his broadcasting career, if not exactly the way he'd dreamed about.

"I dreamed about being a big league broadcaster ever since I was eight years old," revealed Ken.

First port on the dial, though, was WSXB in Rutland, Vermont which, at last reports, didn't have a big league franchise or even a minor league one.

Nor did the second assignment when his path led back to the local area and WJDA in Quincy. We remember Coleman airing area high school football with élan, enthusiasm and also professionalism and accuracy not always gracing that level of sports.

Ken remained at WJDA from December, 1947 til August, 1951 when the trail again turned from the local area, this time to WNEB in Worcester where he put in a year until August, 1952.

"Then I got lucky," relates Coleman referring to the call that came from Cleveland.

His eighth grade dream of being a big league broadcaster became a reality, again if not quite as Coleman had envisioned it.

The call wasn't to broadcast Cleveland Indian baseball but the Cleveland Browns football—very much big league under the Paul Brown coaching aegis. Brown turned out champs more times than the current titlist Steelers ever can claim.

Coleman began a 14-year tenure with what was the Dumond television network which became the largest independent TV network and at one point encompassed 200 stations before the NFL went CBS.

Ken was a familiar of Brownies like quarterback Otto Graham, fullback Marion Mottley, Dub Jones (father of Baltimore quarterback Bert Jones), placekicker Lou Groza, a.k.a. the Toe; et al. So familiar, in fact that Groza is the godfather of Ken's son Bill, and Ken likewise for Lou's son Judd.

Coleman soon cracked the big league baseball lineup with the Indians, too. He aired their games during 10 of his 14 years in Cleveland. It was in his first year at the microphone for the Tribe that the Indians opened with the Sox. So 1979 is reincarnation of that occasion.

While in Cleveland, Ken also became the Voice of Ohio State broadcasting Buckeye football. The coach? Who but Woody Hayes. For \$64 who coached OSU before Hayes?

"A great man," says Coleman of Hayes who finally was junked this year.

"He just had an unfortunate habit of punching people about once a year."

Hayes in his last 'bout' punched a Clemson player in the Gator Bowl.

"A bad move when you're on national television," commented Coleman.

In 1966, Ken came home to replace Curt Gowdy as the Red Sox Voice, and he remained in that capacity through 1974. He wasn't retained when the Sox switched from Channel 4 to Channel 38.

Now's he's back, and the excitement in his tone provides the answer as to his sentiments.

So which is his favorite — football or baseball?

"I know it may sound trite, but I really have no preference," replies Coleman. "Football and baseball, I love them both. I truly miss football. I loved doing Ohio State and Browns games. I've always loved baseball just as much."

Coleman feels extra lucky on one score baseball-wise.

"There's one basic difference between broadcasting football and baseball," he explains. "In football, it isn't so bad if a team isn't winning all the time. After all, the season's much shorter, particularly in college, but in baseball, it can get to be difficult if the club isn't even a contender. (and for everyone, Ken, for everyone)."

"When I was doing the Sox in 1966, they only drew 600,000 for the year, about 8,000 a game. They weren't drawing like they are now. The turnaround year came in 1967 (the Impossible Dream Year). Their magnetism became infectious."

Albeit the Sox certainly rank

as a contender again this year, even hardcore Sox fans have trepidations after the winter trades which strengthened the World Champion New York Yankees — even more. After all, without the added strength, the Yanks staged the phenomenal stretch run that overhauled the Sox last season the year of The Impossible Finish.

How does Coleman see it? Are the Yanks uncatchable? Did they buy themselves another pennant? And World title?

"I hope not," Coleman see it? Are the Yanks uncatchable? Did they buy themselves another pennant? And World title?

"I hope not," Coleman says earnestly. "But the Red Sox have to be figured right up there so it looks like a great season."

Never one to mince words, Coleman declared, "I don't like the free agent draft" which has enabled the Yankees to stake their claim to the championships by acquiring everybody's pitching talent from Catfish Hunter to Luis Tiant just by brandishing the fattest checkbook.

"I don't blame a player for going where he gets the most money," Coleman admits. "But it certainly hasn't been good for the game. I'd hope that something will be done to change the situation before the fans react so adversely that it hurts baseball. There has to be a change. But don't ask me what."

Coleman has another calling besides sports, although it's very much associated. He was a volunteer — worker for the Jimmy Fund. Then last January he was named with an office at the Sidney Farber



Ken Coleman

Cancer Research Center in Boston.

He's one of a staff of four for the Fund which sports have rallied to support for so many years. Jeff Donahue is his assistant and Maureen Burnett and Ruth Ordway office staffers.

The past year alone, Coleman made over 200 appearances at the community level on behalf of the Fund and cancer research.

While so many big names in sports have helped the fund, Coleman says, "It's the local communities and the generosity of people who support cancer research which has kept it going."

Just one name synonymous with the Jimmy Fund, of course, is Ted Williams, the former Red Sox slugger and stormy petrel.

"Ted still helps," emphasized Coleman. "I don't see him as often, but I hear from him regularly. The checks supporting the fund still come from him in the mail."

Ken and Ellen Coleman have five children, although they're a little old to be called children anymore.

There's Casey who's following his father's mike steps as a sports announcer almost literally since he's working in Cleveland. And Kerry, who's attending UMass. Kathleen is employed at the South Boston Boys Club. Susan is in Florida. And Bill — Lou Groza's godson — is studying at the Berkeley School of Music and is a bass guitarist with a musical group, name of Special Delivery, which plays the New England circuit and has had gigs on the South Shore.

Coleman somehow finds time for a passel of hobbies.

"I just took up golf," Ken reveals but he also snorkels in Cohasset waters and jogs. But his favorite is shooting pool.

Ken was an athlete in school playing baseball for North Quincy High and Sacred Heart CYO of Wollaston.

His position? Pitcher. "I was a crafty right-hander," chuckles Ken.

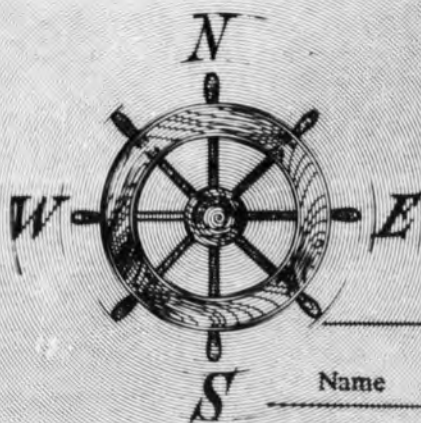
The Red Sox just lost a crafty righthander to the Yankees, namely El Tiant. In a pinch they just might dip into the broadcasting box for Ken's mound services.

Comes March 4, and Ken will be with the Red Sox in spring training at Winterhaven, Fla.

And on April 5, he'll be back 'home' atop Fenway in the broadcasting booth.

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